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ABSTRACT

The Grandpals program at Oak Hill Elementary School in Overland Park, Kansas, meets teachers' needs while providing successful intergenerational programming. The first step in developing a program like Grandpals is to determine program goals, objectives, and theme. A next step is to determine the two populations to be involved. For example, whole schools can adopt entire groups of older adults, or single classrooms can adopt voluntary residents in a long-term care facility. In any case, the population of elders should be able to communicate easily and interact cooperatively with children. The facility chosen must meet criteria related to staff commitment, proximity to the school, and similar socioeconomic status of residents and students. Partner alliances between the facility and school must be collaborative, and a program leader should be designated to act as facilitator and host. Key planning issues include outside funding sources, school and facility liability, parents' awareness and permission, and location of activities. Planners also need to determine how to match the intergenerational partners; and need to make decisions about the type and frequency of activities, taking into account the developmental needs and abilities of the two populations involved. Other aspects of program development are program duration, student and elder orientation and evaluation, advance design of activities, involvement of well elderly to give a balanced view of aging, and the incorporation of aging education into the curriculum. (AC)

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ELEMENTARY SCHOOL-BASED ADOPTED GRANDPARENT PROGRAMS:

Combining Intergenerational Programming With Aging Education

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A Paper presented at the 1993 Association for Gerontology in Higher
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Elementary School-Based Adopted Grandparent Programs: Combining Intergenerational Programming With Aging Education

Educators today are beginning to recognize the value of incorporating intergenerational programming into their elementary school classroom curriculum. Teachers often note students have a positive relationship with their natural grandparents, but due to the prevalence of "ageism" or negative stereotyping of older persons in varied aspects of society (Atchley, 1991), may have a negative view of the aged in general (Fillmer, 1984; Jantz, Seefeldt, Galper, & Serlock, 1977; Miller, Blalock, & Ginsburg, 1984). Teachers witness frequent parental-job transfers of families with school-age children, and acknowledge this mobility may make student's interaction with elders sporadic at best. They also note families with school-age children tend to live in the suburbs which may be devoid of older adults, as well as the tremendous growth in retirement complexes, which further segregate the young and old. (Peacock & Talley, 1984; Pratt, 1984). The net result is that children may have little contact with the elderly; a situation teachers are addressing through school-based intergenerational programming.

Current demographics offer educators credence for their desire to incorporate intergenerational contact into classroom curriculum. Between today and the year 2050, the percentage of persons age 65 and older will rise from the current twelve percent of the total population to 23 percent of the total population (Aging America, 1991, p. 3). Foresight indicates an educator's role in enhancing a positive view of the elderly may become crucial when today's youth are called upon in the future to financially, personally, socially, and governmentally support this large aging cohort. It has been demonstrated that well planned intergenerational programming in the classroom setting can foster a positive view of older adults (Aday, Sims, & Evans 1991; Caspi, 1984; Chapman & Neal, 1990; Dellman-Jenkins, Lambert, & Fruit, 1991).

Elementary school-based adopted grandparent programs are an excellent venue for providing cross-age contact in a supervised and controlled manner, the intent of which is to foster a positive view of aging and the elderly. Unfortunately, educators interested in initiating programs may hesitate to do so due to a perceived lack of aging knowledge or contact with the elderly themselves, a lack of instructional materials, or an absence of proven guidelines for program design (Ausherman, White, & Chenier, 1991; Hoot, 1981). The Grandpals program at Oak Hill Elementary School in Overland Park, KS has been designed to meet the needs of teachers while providing successful intergenerational programming. The following offers guidelines for similar successful program development.

In many cases, teachers seek to establish an adopted grandparent program because they have had a very positive relationship with a grandparent or older adult. Their intent, then, is to instill in their students the notion that older adults are valuable human beings, persons of dignity and worth deserving the utmost respect. Dellman-Jenkins, Lambert, & Fruit (1991, p. 25) further this notion by stating intergenerational programs, especially those which present the reality of the more frail elderly, promote understanding and empathy in children. These qualities would positively serve the involved youth as they themselves age, or as they deal with older adults in the future. Program planners must also believe children can and do make a very positive contribution in the lives of older adults. A helpful first step in program development, then, is for the planners to determine their program goals or objectives. Once accomplished, they should consider stating a program theme. The Grandpals program has two themes: Older adults are valuable people with dignity and worth, and Children are capable of making a positive impact in the lives of older adults. These can be altered to meet the philosophical needs of the individual program planners.

Survival and success of an intergenerational program is often dependent on the initial planning and development phase, as a program will only be as strong as the individual components allow it to be. For this reason, the teachers or other planners must first assess their motivation for initiating such a program. Intergenerational programs are slowly becoming more "popular," but remain novel enough to receive the attention of the press and occasionally garner teacher's awards. Program planners who seek to establish a program for these reasons must remember that a program of this type will ultimately alter countless lives. Interaction between the children and elders will affect both groups, hopefully in positive ways, but change them none the less. If the older population are frail elderly in a long term care facility, the interaction risk for degree of personal involvement becomes even greater. Children in adopted grandparent program will have many other activities they are involved in, and their intergenerational involvement will be a minimal part of their lives. The elders, however, are residing in an institutional setting where the majority of activities are controlled, where interaction with persons outside the institution may be minimal and sporadic. The consistent caring interaction with a concerned child will probably become quite important to them. Therefore, the primary focus of the program must always remain on the children and the elders, and the program leaders must at all times be attuned to protecting the emotional needs of those interacting in the program.

A next step in program design is to determine the two populations to be involved. Adopted grandparent programs can take several forms. Often, whole schools adopt entire long term care facilities, senior centers, retirement complexes, adult day care centers, etc. When this approach is taken, planners must recognize the likelihood that personal level interaction and involvement will be minimal, as will the level of commitment of the elders. Single classrooms may also adopt older adults from a variety of settings, but commonly, independently functioning elderly

hesitate to commit to such a program as they have many other activities at their disposal. For these reasons, single classrooms adopting voluntary residents in a long term care facility provides a basic framework that encourages success for school-based adopted grandparent programs. It is this format that further design suggestions are limited to.

Using single classrooms of students as the youth component in an adopted grandparent program is beneficial for several reasons. First, they are a contained and cohesive group that can function easily as a unit. The teacher can incorporate the program easily into daily curriculum as time and schedules allow. It also becomes a unit the elder participants can identify. Instead of "the school children," as a random group of visitors, it becomes "Mrs. Carnes fourth grade class," which indicates an unchanging, solidified group that will be consistent from meeting to meeting. Single classrooms also self-limit the size of the program. Elementary classroom sizes are usually between twenty and thirty children, which is a manageable size when considering transportation and the size of the rooms in which the two groups will meet. Feroldi (1987) states that "the size of the group must be directly related to the amount of space available in the nursing home's activity room," for when "a group is too large for the space available, the children and residents are unable to mix and mingle the way they should" (p. 6). Participation must be voluntary, however, and if a student does not want to be involved in the program, other arrangements must be made.

By definition, intergenerational programs are "activities that increase cooperation and exchange between any two generations... through which there are shared skills, knowledge and experience" (Newman, 1986, p. 1). They are not merely "service projects," where children provide aid to or perform for elders. Instead, they should be ongoing, interactive, personal, and mutually beneficial planned activities (Prosper, 1987, p. 3). Walz (1988) cautions against instituting intergenerational

programs not meeting these qualifications, for "in the nursing home, elderly residents are too often exploited as some else's audience" (p. 10). The population of elders the planners must seek, then, should be able to function at a level high enough so cooperative interaction with the children may occur. Planners must also once again protect the rights of the elders by seeking persons who can fully participate, and not just a number of elders to fill the program requirement.

Another reason planners should seek an appropriately functioning elder population is that the program will be less successful in reaching it's goals if they do not. Seefeldt (1987a) found that intergenerational programs which are not interactive in nature, ones where the children simply "perform" for elders, may actually result in an increased negative perception of the aged. The facility chosen, thus, must have enough elders who can communicate easily with children and interact in the simple activities planned. The facility chosen must have a large enough population of elders who, according to Hutchinson & Bondy (1990), are "physically present," whose disabilities or illnesses will not prevent them from interacting; "mentally present," or cogitatively aware of what they are doing so as to interact with the child; and "able to see or hear enough to carry on a conversation" (p. 20).

Choosing a long term care facility thus involves many variables. Many schools will have limited or no choice in the facility they use, as the town may support a small number of facilities, or even only one. If this is so, the program will have to be flexible enough to accommodate what is available to work with. If there is a choice, a number of factors should be considered prior to finalizing the choice of an intergenerational partner. Clearly, a prime consideration will be the attitude and enthusiasm of the long term care facility staff. The Activity Director will most likely be the staff member facilitating the incorporation of the intergenerational program into the elder's daily activities, and this director must be a willing participant. Their

attitude, willingness to increase their work load, to help plan, set up and clean up after meetings, and be a positive promoter of the program to the residents will ultimately make or break a program.

The proximity of the facility to the school will also be a consideration. If planners seek to instill a sense of "community" into their program, they should seek a facility near to the school. This proximity also will aid when considering transportation of children or elders. If the facility is close enough to walk to, fund outlays will be decreased considerably. By definition, intergenerational programs involve ongoing, frequent interactions, and the proximity of the two institutions may bear on this, also. The two facilities should be close enough together to promote ease of access; the distance between the two must not be a barrier. Kocarnik & Ponzetti (1991) state that "physical proximity is probably the most salient factor in determining the frequency of visits between children and the elderly. The location of schools or child care centers in relation to nursing homes often determines the feasibility of interaction on a regular basis" (p. 99-100). Nancy Feroldi (1987) does, however, caution against forming intergenerational partnerships simply on the basis of distance. She states that planners should never assume that the "school/nursing home down the street is the best partner for the program" (p. 6). More important is the willingness of the two groups to work cooperatively together.

When assessing facilities, it may also be important to consider the socioeconomic as well as socioeducational status of both groups. A school and long term care facility in close proximity will most likely house similar status persons, but this is not always true. Alford (1978, p. 47) points out that the affluent elderly may require relationships with persons who have a similar economic frame of reference as they do, and who have had (or could have) similar experiences. Kocarnik & Ponzetti (1991) suggest that the "social background of the residents will suggest which activities might be of interest to individual participants. Cultural traditions,

religious beliefs, occupational experiences, educational training, and socioeconomic background will impact the types of programs which seniors and children will be interested in and excited about" (p. 103). Sparling & Rogers (1985) state that the educational level and types of experiences the elders have had may determine how they interact in the program. Conversely, parents will likely be much more willing to support and participate enthusiastically in a program that they feel is combining "like" types of people.

If there is a choice of facilities, the program planners/teacher should assess several before reaching a decision. An on-site visit is imperative, and while there, the planners/teacher should observe the building layout and meet. Room size to determine if the facility will physically meet the program needs. The Activity Director or designated representative/partner should be talked to at length to determine their desired level of involvement, their cooperativeness, and whether or not the necessary number of their population will be willing to participate in an adopted grandparent program.

When a facility meeting the needs of the planners has been determined, they once again should determine if the two separate entities are going to be compatible when working together. The partner alliances must be collaborative and able to share effectively in both the activity planning, continued participation, and evaluation of the program (Newman, 1986). It may be quite helpful at this time to designate one specific leader who is clearly to be in charge of the program's future implementation (Seefeldt, 1987b). This leader may be the teacher or primary planner, or whoever they designate. If the long term care facility representative (eg. Activity Director) is not agreeable with the division of power, demands more control, or overruns further planning, it will be best to seek a different facility to work with from the outset. When choosing a long term care facility, it is never better to make do if it can be done better.

It is presumed that the designated program leader will be the teacher. Unfortunately, teachers often have a difficult enough time getting their daily workload completed, which may make the addition of an intergenerational program a prohibitive time consuming difficulty. For those with time restrictions, it may prove "program saving" to designate one specific person who is to be in charge of the day-to-day coordination of the program. Kocarnik & Ponzetti (1991, p. 104) suggest designating a "facilitator," who will be available to initiate and assist with the intergenerational activities, to act as "host" to both groups so conversations can be initiated or extended, and so that questions can be responded to appropriately by all in the program. The designation of this facilitator may prevent the diffusion of power among many, aiding in decreasing the potential for confusion, duplication, and conflict of ideas regarding the direction the activities should be taking. It will also aid in minimizing the number of personal biases inducted into the setting.

Finding someone willing to donate this time to the program may not be so easily remedied, however. A concerned parent or PTO volunteer with an interest in older adults may be recruited to serve in this capacity. As the facilitator will spend at least some of their time in the long term care facility, it would be helpful for this person to have at least a basic understanding of gerontology and special needs of older adults so that they do not inadvertently further the negative stereotyping of elders. It is often found that a program is only as strong as the coordinating powers of the facilitator, as time restrictions of both the teacher and Activity Director may hinder optimal program potential. A good facilitator may be the key component of a successful program.

A second key component that will determine virtually the entire scope of the adopted grandparent program is funding. Ideally, the teacher can work costs of materials and transportation into the classroom budget, but this is highly unlikely. If the school district allows their busses to be used free of charge, and if the long

term care facility has their own bus to transport the elders, then the program cash outlay will be significantly reduced. Most programs will not be this lucky. The majority of programs will have to contract busses for the children, and transportation for the elders may be cost prohibitive. Parental transportation of the children is never recommended for liability reasons. Materials can possibly be absorbed by the regular classroom allotment, but once again, will probably not be adequately available. Materials may also be donated by families, but parents may not be as enthusiastic about an extra-curricular project if they have to fund it. The long term care facility may be willing to donate materials for some of the shared activities, but classroom materials for letter writing, holiday decorations, and shared activity costs will still need to be purchased.

Outside funding may thus be imperative for this type of intergenerational program. To obtain funding, teachers should begin by approaching the School Administrator to determine if District Foundation or Administrative grants are available. Administrators typically also have a listing of available grants from other sources that can be applied for. Local businesses or larger corporations may also be willing to donate funds.

The issue of liability should be considered, as children and possibly elders will be taken out of their regular buildings for the project. Jane Angelis (1990, p. 9) suggests gaining the approval of the Board of Directors of the long term care facility, as well as investigating the school's liability policy to determine coverage for this type of activity. The school superintendent and principal also need to be informed of the program and give their approval. It is imperative that each person in authority formally write a letter stating they are aware of the program and that they assume liability for the people under their jurisdiction.

Angelis (1990) also suggests the planners create an awareness of the program for parents. The Grandpals program offers a Parent Handbook that details the

program, offers general information on long term care facilities, and information on normal aging so they will be informed participants in the program. Parents then sign a release stating they have read the handbook and understand what the program will entail for their child. Parents should be encouraged to participate, as their assistance can be valuable. Parents involved in the Grandpals program also sign releases for general program involvement, transportation for their child, and a release of photographs for use in scrapbooks or by the newsmedia. It is suggested that all programs hold parent orientations and have permission forms signed by parents.

The contact person at the long term care facility should also determine if proper permission for transportation of the elders as well as photograph release exists. This is usually kept on file in the office of the long term care facility, but if it is not, it needs to be obtained in writing. It may also be wise for the elder partner or the facility itself to formally inform family members of participation in a program which may draw them out of the building.

Another consideration to address is where the activities will take place. Ideally, the students and elders would alternate going to each other's sites, but as this program is designed to partner students with institutionalized frail elderly, this may be unrealistic. Planners should take into account the difficulties elders may have adjusting to a new and unfamiliar environment simply on the basis of age and possible disabilities. It has been determined that if the environment is known and comfortable to the elder, it may free those with sensory and physical limitations to concentrate on the interactions and activities themselves instead of on the physical setting demands (Sparling & Rogers, 1985). The long term care facility is hopefully architecturally designed to meet the specific environmental needs of older adults, as handrails, accessible restrooms, and appropriate floor surfaces, lighting, and furniture should be tailored to their needs. (Jordan, 1983-84). The elders may

legitimately need access to their rooms if they tire easily, as well as access to the nursing staff present in the facility.

Pairing of intergenerational partners is a next design step. The Grandpals program formally pairs elders and students one-to-one if the population of voluntary elders will support it, but no more than two-to-one. By doing so, both parties achieve a feeling of "ownership." The child comes to feel their Grandpal is truly "theirs," and conversely the elder can focus their attention on one specific child. Seefeldt (1987b) notes that "interacting with children on a one-to-one basis is intrinsically rewarding. Elders receive the admiration of the child and observe the joy and satisfaction the child receives from their presence and attention. When this type of interaction takes place, both elders and children benefit" (p. 17).

Intimacy versus casual contact is frequently cited as desirable to increase positive relationships between the two intergenerational partners (Amir, 1969; Chapman, & Neal, 1990; Seefeldt, 1987b). If a program goal is to foster a close, bonded relationship, then the planners should plan to hold the majority of activities at the long term care facility. This will ensure that elder disabilities or an inability to travel will not prohibit the two intergenerational partners from meeting when the whole group does.

The form of pairing will also determine the scope of program activities. One-to-one pairing allows for pen-pal letter exchange, life review projects, gift exchange, personal visits and phone calls to a new "friend" outside of school, and the possibility of a continued relationship once the school year ends. Projects become "together" projects, as two designated, paired people of different ages work together to accomplish an enjoyable task. It allows an elder who never have children to say "I have an adopted grandson. Can you believe it? Finally, at my age!" Or when residents see the facilitator in the building they say "How's my Kent? When is he coming to visit?"

The program planners will also need to determine the type of and frequency of activities. It has been demonstrated that the "quality of contact may be at least as important as its quantity" (Knox, Gekoski, & Johnson, 1986, p. 309). Seefeldt (1987b, p. 16) offers program recommendations to promote quality of contact, which include protecting the prestige of elders and children, limiting frustration for both adults and children, planning interaction that has integrity and is functional for both groups, and ensuring that contact is rewarding and pleasant for all.

In order to do so, the program planners should acknowledge the developmental needs and abilities of the two specific populations involved. Once again, there should be an understanding of gerontology as well as child development by those instituting the program (Kocarnik & Ponzetti, 1991). For activities to be interactive, all must be able to participate, and thus will probably be very simple. Hill (1987) suggests allowing the elderly and youth to plan many of the activities themselves to provide a more accurate determination of what the participants are interested in and capable of doing. Planning activities that can be successful will allow for the contact to provide integrity and be pleasant and rewarding.

Walz & Blum (1988) suggest age cohort factors should be considered when planning activities. As the elders residing in a long term care facility today will be primarily of the Pre-World War II cohort, they may share the attitudinal/behavioral characteristics of a work ethic versus a leisure-work ethic, a religious orientation vs. a secular orientation, a family and patriotic orientation, an acceptance of well differentiated sex roles, a respect for food as a basis for survival and not as an abundant consumer commodity, a time reference as seasonal more than clock-bound, a respect for nature, and a belief in individualism (Walz & Blum, 1988, p. 4).

Thus, activity planners may want to consider work-based topics, religiously framed or patriotic activities, food-centered activities, activities favoring tradition, ritual and ceremony, nature based, and family-oriented activities (Walz & Blum, 1988,

p. 5). Furthermore, to promote the elders as persons of value and worth, it may be beneficial for the elders to share their skills and expertise, their memories, and games, music, and creative hobbies of their era. (Walz & Blum, 1988).

Besides determining the quality and quantity of interaction, the planners should consider the duration of the program. The Adopted Grandparent Program handbook (1987) states that "six months is minimal for the development of a close relationship, a year is *ideal*" (p. 6). School-based adopted grandparents should run for as much of the school year as possible. From the beginning, however, the planners should note it may be difficult at the end of the year for the two parties to separate. The program has spent much time and effort to build a relationship, and then when school ends, the association between elder and child by definition ceases to exist. Holding voluntary activities during the summer, encouraging letter writing, and encouraging family members to continue to foster the relationship may help in easing the withdrawal. The planners may consider forming an "intergenerational alumnae," where children who have moved to higher grades can continue to help in the program by assisting Grandpals to write their pen-pal letters, etc. Many intergenerational partners continue their relationship outside of school for many years after official involvement in the program.

Other aspects to consider in program development are student and elder orientation and evaluation. Both students and elders must know in advance exactly what is expected of them, and have a means of receiving feedback and factual question answers throughout the program. A formal orientation for students and elders will be essential in easing tension at the beginning of the program for both. Likewise, planners should anticipate in advance offering a written program evaluation for students, elders, long term facility staff, and parents at the conclusion of the school year so as to make any necessary adjustments the following year.

The actual month-to-month design of activities should also be planned in advance so that the program becomes cohesive and continual. The Grandpals program incorporates monthly pen-pal letter exchange, a monthly group activity, a life review project done by the individual students that spans the school year and eventually becomes a written theme, and the making of holiday door decorations for the Grandpals. The teacher can determine the degree and type of activities that will most easily accommodate his/her schedule, but must strive to make the total design one allowing for continued interaction and involvement.

Program planners should also consider their approach in the case of an elder's inability to continue in the program/death, or the transfer of a student. Utilization of school counselors, lifespan discussions, and helpful children's literature may be utilized in the case of death. Re-partnering must be done carefully, and both parties need to know they can discuss their concerns/loss with the program coordinators.

This adopted grandparent portion of an school based intergenerational program will be the central aspect, but many caution against making it the only contact (Dellman-Jenkins, Lambert, & Fruit, 1991, Seefeldt, 1987a). As only five percent of persons over the age of 65 live in long term care facilities at any one time (Johnson & Grant, 1985, p. 3), it may be beneficial to incorporate elderly from the community, as well as natural grandparents, into the classroom to present a more well-rounded view of aging. The utilization of well elderly should be built into the month to month outline developed for program activities.

Another essential component the program planners should consider is the induction of aging education into the classroom curriculum. It has been repeatedly documented that integrating aging education into classroom curriculum is effective in fostering positive attitudes toward the elderly in children (Ausherman, White, & Chenier, 1991; Corbin, Metal-Corbin, & Barg, 1989; Hauwiller & Jennings, 1981;

Murphy-Russell, Die, & Walker, 1986; Rich, Myrick, & Campbell, 1983; & Seefeldt, Jantz, Galper, & Serock, 1981). Aging education becomes a supplement to cross-age contact, offering children factual information on aspects particular to the older population. This information can then be applied to situations encountered in the contact. For example, children who have knowledge of the physiology of strokes can then understand why their senior partner functions as he/she does and adapt accordingly, or they can take factual information on retirement and understand the social and financial ramifications so they can interact effectively.

Unfortunately, studies suggest "teachers are not knowledgeable of important facts about aging, (which) validates their perception that they lack the knowledge to teach it effectively" (Ausherman, White, & Chenier, 1991, p. 398). The teacher with little aging knowledge must use caution to present information free of the stereotypes they hope to counter (Davis & Westbrook, 1981). The Grandpals program utilizes an annotated bibliography of children's literature, teaching aging through picture books. Summaries and aging information applications for each book provide teachers with a knowledge base on many elder-specific subjects they can then share with their students. These picture books are shared throughout the school year to provide continuity and aid teachers with time restrictions. Sharing two to three books a week can easily be worked into a teacher's busy schedule.

Seefeldt et al (1981) states that "Some would argue that schools are not in the business of teaching children attitudes toward aging and the elderly. Yet research does suggest that the school, as a transmitter of the culture and perpetrator of society, must meet its responsibility in terms of attitude formation... (p. 86). Furthermore, Ausherman, White, & Chenier (1991) state "Life satisfaction of both teachers and students may be negatively affected when misinformation and less-than-positive attitudes are held toward the elderly. As the proportion of the aged

continues to grow, life satisfaction may be significantly affected by education that includes accurate information and reflects positive attitudes" (p. 399).

Developing an intergenerational program that includes intimate contact with frail elderly, exposure to well elderly from the community, and a component of accurate aging education may provide a positive framework for both teachers and students resulting in positive and satisfying relationships with elders in the future. As aging is an inevitable event, instilling a positive attitude towards older adults in children today will hopefully serve to foster attitudes of elder worth and dignity when the current middle-aged and children become elders themselves. For this reason alone, it is an effort that teachers can and should make.

Designing Elementary School Based Adopted-Grandparent Programs

- *Formulate program goals
- *State program themes
- *Define youth population
- *Locate available long term care facilities
- *Contact Administrator or Activity Director of long term care facility
- *Make on-site visits to interested facilities
- *Determine compatibility with long term care staff
- *Ensure that long term care population will have sufficient voluntary, high functioning elders to support program
- *Designate a program leader
- *Appoint a facilitator
- *Seek funding
- *Determine type of transportation needed plus cost of different options
- *Address liability
- *Determine where activities will take place
- *Decide how intergenerational partners will be paired
- *Determine type and frequency of activities
- *Determine duration of program
- *Plan orientation/evaluation of parents, children, and elders
- *Devise month-to-month schedule
- *Plan incorporation of well elderly/natural grandparents into the classroom
- *Plan for inclusion of aging education into classroom curriculum

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